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ABSTRACT

A review of the research concerning the relationship between children's reading achievement and television viewing reveals many contradictions. For example, the findings show that the amount of television viewing that affects reading achievement in one child may not affect another in the same way. What a child watches on television also seems to have differing effects. More research needs to be conducted on specific types of programing and their effects on reading. (FL)

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WHAT RESEARCH SAYS ABOUT THE EFFECTS OF TELEVISION VIEWING ON THE READING ACHIEVEMENT OF ELEMENTARY SCHOOL CHILDREN

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by

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There are many factors to consider when studying the effects of television on reading. The amount of time a child views television is a major factor in its relationship to reading achievement. It has been found that children spend approximately three to four hours each day, seven days per week watching television.

Witty(1959) having recorded the amount of children's televiewing over at least a decade found that elementary school children prefer television to almost any other activity and spend three hours a day watching it.

According to Moldenhauer and Miller (1980) good readers were not watching significantly more or less television than poor readers, but results show that these students were viewing television an average of four hours a day, Monday through Friday after school. There was no relationship between television viewing and reading achievement.

Research indicates that younger children spend more time watching television than older children. Neuman (1981) examined the state of Connecticut's third assessment of educational progress in reading

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which included questions relating to television viewing habits in students' homes and their attitudes toward reading. The study showed that fourth grade students spent more time watching television than eighth grade students. Also, the number of students reporting "enjoyment" with reading decreased with age while the number of students reporting a "dislike" of reading increased with age. Reading scores for the fourth grade students, the heaviest television viewers, were relatively unrelated to television viewing. However, for the eighth grade student, those watching more than four hours of television a day scored lower on achievement than those watching a more moderate amount indicating an inverse relationship between heavy television viewing and reading achievement.

There have been various findings on the effect of heavy television viewing on reading achievement. Scott (1956) found that students who watched television fewer hours had consistently higher achievement scores.

Starkey and Swinford (1974) agreed with Scott's findings. They studied 226 fifth and sixth graders in a mid-western suburban city. A slight relationship between reading ability and amount of leisure time spent watching television was found. The better readers were found to watch less television than poor readers. They concluded that not all television viewing is a bad influence on the child and that a child should be taught to be a discriminating television viewer.

In a large-scale survey study conducted by Schramm (1961) contrary findings were reported. The study established that elementary school

children with the highest marks were the heaviest television watchers. It was also concluded that television helped the low achievers develop vocabulary skills that the non-television child did not have. At about age ten, children of better mental ability (115 IQ or higher) reached what he called a "saturation point." The middle and lower IQ groups reached the saturation point some time later.

Busch (1978) agreed with Schramm's findings. Busch found that preschool and primary youngsters benefited most from television viewing. But by age ten to twelve a saturation point is reached and total knowledge declines as television viewing increases.

There has been some research done on the effect of television viewing on reading and school achievement, and much of the research has shown no relationship between the two.

Childers and Ross (1973) studied the televiewing habits of 100 fourth and fifth graders in relation to IQ, GPA, and Iowa Tests of Basic Skills scores. Relationships were not significant, indicating that quantity and quality of televiewing is not a predicator of pupil achievement. They suggest that parents and teachers should not blame television for the low scholastic achievement, but they should make an attempt to educate their children in the effective use of this medium.

Himmelweit (1958) made a large-scale survey study and found that television had not created viewers who were markedly better or worse at any school subject.

In a study conducted by Ridder (1973) no significant relationship was found between academic achievement and the total number of hours spent viewing television. Although there may be many fine programs of educational value, the majority of the participants were found to prefer viewing television programs of a more recreational nature. She believes that pupils who neglect their school work to view television would continue to neglect their school work for other activities if television were not available to them.

Barth and Swiss (1976) notes while there is a definite relationship between television and reading, the exact nature is not known at this time.

Even though much of the research has shown no or unknown relationships between television and reading achievement, a few of the studies have indicated a negative relationship between television and various areas of reading achievement.

The effects of home television use on school performance was noted by Hornik (1978). Research suggests, but does not establish, a small negative effect. There was no obvious effect on short term achievement, however, there was consistent negative effects on reading improvement over a 2 to 3 year period.

Stura (1981) conducted a study to determine if the programming on a commercial television network would reveal a low number of positive references to reading. The major findings were that the majority of the references to reading were functional or job related

and made for specific purpose other than enjoyment. The findings implied that television might be conditioning children not to read for enjoyment.

Some research did not find a negative relationship as a whole, but found various negative aspects. As in Neuman's study (1981), which found that the total amount of television viewed was not related to reading achievement and leisure reading habits. However, an analysis of television content showed negative relationship between adventure shows and reading scores.

LaBlonde (1967) studied the viewing habits of 294 children in the fifth grade and found no relationship between scholastic achievement and television habits except in the area of work-study skills.

With children watching television between 21 and 30 hours per week, it would be wise to integrate television viewing and reading skills. Hutchinson (1979) proposes The Learning Model for Watching Television which is geared toward the student who watches many hours of television weekly with no "real purpose" in mind. By integrating reading components with the students' social interests, the model motivates the student and then directly relates his weekly television programs to his classroom instructional experiences.

Potter (1981) asks the following questions regarding the integration of television and reading: Will using television data in lessons or as a text cause youngsters to watch even more television than they do

at present? With the abundance of material now being presented by the television industry, educational publishers, and the United States government, is enough known about television/reading experiences and outcomes for wise review and selection of materials? And is television/reading experience in class really just a supplementary motivational tool or is it best used in direct reading skill instruction, as a subject to study in itself. Or both?

Fowles (1976) lists some attributes of reading instruction via television that warrant consideration:

1. Television has a positive attraction for children. Children know that a television program cannot single them out for ridicule, punish them, humilate them, force them to do tedious exercises, or show disappointment or lose patience if they fail.
2. Television has great powers to capture and hold and direct attention.
3. Repetition, which is useful to slow learners, can be effectively utilized by television.
4. It can prevent the same simple instructional goal in many guises.
5. Television can be used to convey a principle, which is otherwise difficult to explain to young children.

The literature shows much contradiction in regards to television viewing and reading achievement. The amount of television viewing that affects reading achievement in one child may not affect another child in the same way. What a child watches on television is also a factor. More research needs to be done on specific types of programming and its effect on reading. With the coming of the

electronic and video age it would seem certain that children's viewing hours will be increased. It would appear that television and reading will have to be used together if any progress is to be made in the area of reading.

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